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ABSTRACT

Three issues related to improving basic skills in this nation are discussed in this paper: the definition of "basic literacy skills" and the number of Americans who are purportedly illiterate, what evidence exists that minorities in the United States really have a more serious problem than others in acquiring basic literacy skills, and what is known about ways of improving basic literacy skills. The definition used in this paper in the one given in the Elementary Secondary Education Act, Title II, Basic Skills Improvement Program, that basic skills include reading, mathematics, and effective oral and written communication. Studies reporting varied rates of adult literacy are reviewed and compared. Studies are discussed that show that in spite of great improvement over the years, poor minority children still lag behind others in basic skills achievement. Possible reasons for this are suggested. In an analysis of the research on ways to improve basic literacy skills ten factors common to successful reading programs are listed and 12 instructional variables associated with effective teaching are cited. (MKM)

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READING: SOME CAN AND SOME CAN'T

Delivered before the State Reading Association and the
State Department of Education: Region IV
Houston, Texas

February 16, 1980

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READING: SOME CAN AND SOME CAN'T

Let me start out by exposing my bias and confessing my personal dedication to seeing that every human being in our country gets a fair shot at effectively developing the skills of reading, writing, speaking and mathematics. I think that the basic skills of literacy, especially reading, are the most important tools that we can give people--young or old. Why? Because if you cannot read, write, speak, and/or compute, it is over for you in our highly literate society.

Learning to read is a privilege that all Americans have not always been allowed to share. Reading frees the mind and maybe it even frees the soul and the spirit; as one writer observed, "Stone walls do not a prison make". Reading opens up the world and options for life and living. A democratic society is predicated on having an educated population, and to be educated, all of the population must have a high degree of literacy.

Reading is an essential skill for active and meaningful participation in this country. As more people become aware of this, we in education are going to face some very different "educational" crises. Take the Peter Doe case for instance. In California, a young man eager to find employment went for several job interviews - only to discover that his skills of reading were inadequate to obtain even a minimum level job. Peter Doe as he is called, is

a graduate of a San Francisco high school. Thoroughly dismayed after encountering numerous rejections, Peter decided to file a suit against both the State government and the school district. Essentially, his complaint are that neither he nor his parents were ever told that he had a reading problem. He never received special instruction, but was graduated, an illiterate person. In Florida and many other States similar lawsuits are pending on this and minimal competency testing efforts designed to prvent Peter's situation to thisyoung man and 23 million other Americans, the Right to Read has been denied.

Acquiring language skills is a basic human right. The capacity to send and receive language messages distinguishes humanity from all other forms of life. As former Commissioner Ernest Boyer reminded us in his September 8, 1978 White House Conference on International Literacy speech:

> "All we know, all we fear and all we hope is created and conveyed through symbols, and a man or woman who does not master the written word is isolated from the past, ignorant of the future, trapped in a tiny world of narrow possibilities and tragically cut off from the benefits of life."

President Carter, in his International Literacy Day proclamation (1978), declared that "Education is one of the most important gifts our society can give to its people...Especially in our modern world - adequate communication skills

are essential to improve the lives of all people, and guarantee their basic human rights." The President went on to say that every illiterate adult is an indictment of us all.

In spite of the well meaning efforts at the Federal, State, and local levels, some current basic skills improvement efforts have the potential of being more destructive than constructive in helping students most in need of help. If attitudes and programs are not designed to make a serious effort to examine what we are doing to and for students and on improving the delivery of basic skills services, we may be destroying the lives of those we purport to want to help most by pushing them out of school without operational levels of basic skills, without high school certification (diploma), and with a great deal of damage done to their self image. That damaged self image might be vented by hostile acts to society (called crime), and a concomitant increase in what I choose to call unemployability potential (Welfare syndrome). This could be called the pushed out-of-school, out-of-work, out-of-formal (productive) society syndrome.

Let us briefly explore three issues related to improving basic skills in this nation:

1. How is the term "basic literacy skills" defined and how many Americans are purportedly illiterate?

2. The challenge for the 80's is to raise the basic skills levels of minorities. What evidence is there that minorities really have a more serious problem than others in acquiring basic literacy skills in this nation? Why does this problem exist for minority youngsters and what are the consequences of illiteracy for minority youngsters?

3. What do we know about ways of improving basic literacy skills?

HOW ARE BASIC LITERACY SKILLS DEFINED AND HOW MANY AMERICAN ARE ILLITERATE?

Title II: ESEA: Basic Skills Improvement Program (P.L. 95-561) defines basic skills as reading, mathematics and effective communications both oral and written. (It does not mean minimal, nor specify lower socioeconomic targeting). The purpose of this legislation is to find programs that demonstrate effective basic skills coordination and instruction. Some States and local educational agencies define basic skills in "functional" terms, others in "academic" achievement terms, and others in terms of minimal competencies.

Studies done during the 1970's have provided several estimates of the extent of illiteracy in the United States. Harmon (1970) estimated that more than 50 million adults in this country were functionally illiterate. In the same year Louis Harris and Associates reported 18 million adults

and 7 million children with inadequate reading skills (Rosenthal 1970). Harris (1971) concluded that over 15 million would have difficulty with real-life situations requiring ability to understand or produce written language. The National Center for Health Statistics (Vogt, 1973) found that 1 million non-instutionalized teenagers (about 11% of all such 12-to 17-year olds) could not read at the beginning fourth-grade level. According to the Adult Performance Level Project (Northcutt 1975) over one-half of the adult public could not read adequately. The 1975 Mini-Assessment of Educational Progress (Gadway and Wilson, 1975) reported that 50% to 80% of 17- year-olds still in school could not perform functional reading tasks such as interpreting an insurance policy or understanding a parking ticket. Murphy (1973) found similarly high rates of failure by adults on reading tasks typically encountered at work or daily living such as interpreting a bus schedule or following directions for the use of a product. The specifics of defining basic skills are left to State and local educational agencies, not the Federal government.

While these studies of functional reading ability typically estimate that as much as 50 percent of the adult population is illiterate, the U.S. Bureau of Census in 1969 found <u>only about one percent</u> of the population 14 years and over to be illiterate <u>reduced from the twenty percent</u> found 100 years earlier. These disparities are due to different definitions and different methods of measuring literacy in

the population.

The National Basic Skills Office provides the following summary on illiteracy: Mack (1976) reviewed numerous literacy studies and found that estimates of how many persons are considered illiterate vary widely. He also concludes that literacy is related to specific tasks and specific contexts and that there can be no universal definition of literacy.

Mack offers the following points on defining and assessing literacy: Historically Americans have defined literacy as the ability to read and write one's name, or to score at some grade level on a standardized test. Mack bolsters that point with two dictionary definitions of literacy: Webster's (1976) defined literacy as the ability to read and write; Black's Law dictionary (1968) defined illiterate as "unlettered, ignorant, unlearned, and generally used to describeone who cannot read and write."

The Census Bureau statistical abstract of 1974 considers anyone literate who was 14 years old or older and has completed the 6th grade. (Age and grade) (6)

In 1973, the National Center for Health Statistics conducted a survey using their Brief Test of Literacy. The results showed that 4.8 percent of people 12-17 years old scored below the average 4th grader on the instrument and can therefore be regarded as illiterate. (3)*

In 1970, the National Reading Center asked Louis Harris to conduct a study of adult functional literacy. Thirteen (13) percent of the sample, or an estimated 18.5 million Americans were rated marginally literate to functionally illiterate. (1)

*Numbers correspond to Appendix A: Assessment of Literacy

Harris conducted a second survey in 1971 which focused on reading skills that are required to cope with common every day experiences. The conclusion from this survey was that four (4) percent of the U.S. population 16 and over is seriously deficient in functional reading abilities. (2)

Norvel Northcutt attempted to establish a pool of competencies attributable to a literate person. He determined that as many as 20 percent of the adult population are functionally incompetent. The most troublesome area tested was computation. (4)

Bormuth considers literacy, "The ability to exhibit all of the behaviors a person needs in order to respond appropriately to all possible reading tasks." Reading requirements for job performance has been called "relative functional literacy."

The United Nations, in its first attempt to define a threshold level of literacy, described it in 1948 as the "ability to read and write a simple message in any language." But when UNESCO began to gather worldwide statistics on literacy in the 1950's, it accepted whatever definition was used by each country. Some used the completion of a certain number of years of school; others accepted the person's word that he could read or write. (7)

The World Education's study, Adult Illiteracy in the United States: A Report to the Ford Foundation, by Carmen St. John Hunter and David Harmon (1979) points out that two million adult Americans never attended any school, 14 million more never finished the fifth grade, 10 million others dropped out between the fifth grade and the eighth grade and 30 million dropped out of high school, making a total of 56 million adults without diplomas.

The report indicates that there is a strong relationship between poverty and illiteracy, pointing out that 41 million American adults earn less than $7000 a year and that they are usually the people with the least schooling. There is a hard core of illiterates, disportionately members of minority groups, who almost never enroll in anv of the programs designed to combat illiteracy, according to the report.

The report concludes that "many will never enroll in programs of any sort for diverse reasons. Cultural or linguistic barriers, fear of failing, distrust of the institutions of the mainstream culture, reliance on electronic media as a substitute for the written word and the ability of some to find satisfaction despite low levels of academic attainment".

In summary although there are many variations on defining literacy and correspondingly different numbers assigned to the persons experiencing the dibilitating effects of illiteracy, most agree that somewhere between 18-23% of the American Adult population is functionally illiterate. These people are prohibited from carrying on the normal functions of life required in a highly literate society.

WHAT EVIDENCE IS THERE THAT MINORITIES REALLY HAVE A MORE SERIOUS PROBLEM THAN OTHERS IN ACQUIRING BASIC LITERACY SKILLS IN THIS NATION AND THAT IS WHERE TARGETED ASSISTANCE MUST BE PLACED FOR THE 80's?

Educators should not be apologetic nor intimidated. Compared with the rest of the world and the immediate past, namely the 1960's when test scores dropped so drastically, the 70's show a steady increase in achievement for American youngsters in the lower grades, an indication that American schools are generally doing a good job in educating most American children.

While there are reported results from Western Europe, the Soviet Union and other countries which are flagged as indicators of excellence in their schools, no other country with a population as diverse as ours is doing as well as we are. American schools <u>are</u> doing an admirable job of meeting the needs of a very diverse group of people, all with very

different backgrounds, experiences, and expectations. This country does not have an organized system for "forcing out" students not easily acclimated to the American system of schooling. This is not true in many other countries.

This is not to say there is not considerable of room for improvement. American schools generally still inadequately serve the needs of handicapped, poor whites (especially rural) migrants, Hispanics,(and other limited English speaking groups) Blacks and Native Americans. Poor and minority children consistently surface as underachievers in our many assessment programs. But this does not mean that schools everywhere are failing. We must remember that there are five (5) areas of achievement which particularly mark America's public education system.

1. More students now complete high school.
2. The ten-year decline in SAT verbal scores has abated somewhat.
3. The National Assessment of Education Progress Study (NAEP)(17 yr-in-school) shows 2% overall improvement from 1971 to 1975; showing that 87% of the American students are functionally literate.
4. The National Assessment of Educational Progress shows striking gains for 9-year-old students, especially black youngsters in the South.(a 5 percentage point gain)
5. State competency assessments show marked and steady increases in student achievement.

More students complete high school

- In 1900, about 6 percent of youth completed high school; now 80 percent of our youth complete high school and about half of those go on to further education.
- Evidence from Army tests and the Iowa tests of Basic Skills (our best longitudinal data) lead us to believe that the general levels of literacy, knowledge, and skills of today's youth are higher than they were forty years ago.
- High school graduates of forty years ago were a select group; approximately 40 percent of their age group, compared to high school graduates now-about 80% of their age group.

Obviously, the 40% most inclined to have difficulty in high school dropped out leaving a much more "select" group of high school students forty years ago - not true today.

The doors of equity, opportunity and access have opened and with them the challenge to provide everyone with a quality education. The issue we are facing now is whether we can have equality of educational opportu-

nity and educational excellence at the same time? Our answer to this query must always be "yes"; this must remain a goal of American education.

But even in terms of minorities, our record is improving:

- In 1950 only one of every four black children finished high school in America; today, three out of four black children complete high school.
- Black enrollment is now about 13 percent of the college-age population - roughly equivalent to the black share of the overall population.
- Although a good number of these black students are in two-year community colleges, that still is a level most blacks never had a prayer of reaching even a generation ago.
- In 1960, there were 435 blacks in white colleges in the South. Today there are well over 100,000.
- The number of minority students in postsecondary education has increased from 500,000 ten years ago to 1.7 million today.

The ten-year decline in SAT verbal scores has abated somewhat.

The average verbal score of the one million high school seniors who took the Scholastic Aptitude Test in 1977-78 held steady at 429 showing a slowing of the 10 year declining trend.

Unfortunately scores went down again slightly last year and even in 1977-78, the average math score, which had declined as much as the verbal score, continued a downward trend by declining two points, from 470 to 468. We must remember, however, that SAT scores reflect the assessment of a very different level of skills, a very select population, and a very different content from that assessed by common standardized achievement tests in basic skills.

The National Assessment of Education Progress Study (17 yr in-school youth) showed promising improvement in comparisons between the 1971 and 1975 results.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress definitely shows children (9-year olds) have been improving in the basics; reading, writing, and math; white children and black, North and South. The Assessment found the most striking gains among 9-year-old black children. This is significant because the Federal government has spent most of its ESEA education dollars helping younger children from poor families in their early years of schooling. National and State achievement tests testify to the effectiveness of this strategy. The high schools are the new frontier.

State competency examinations in Michigan, Indiana, Maryland and Florida to name a few states, show marked improvement in achievement of youngsters on these tests, despite the rocky road that these tests have followed.
In spite of these findings, however, the general public feels that children are not acquiring the basic skills. George Neavoll, editor of the editorial page in the Wichita Eagle and Beacon writes:

"I always can tell when a letter from a young person is written for our Public Forum. It is illiterate. The writer usually doesn't have the vaguest idea of the difference between "their" and "there" or even "to" and "too", can't construct a sentence properly; knows practically nothing about capitalization or punctuation; rambles incoherently and writes in a childish scrawl. It breaks my heart every-time I see it. Besides not being able to write, young people today can't read, or speak adequately or reason, or add or subtract very well. These aren't just poor black kids from the ghetto. They are the sons and daughters of white Anglo-Saxon Protestant Americans born with silver spoons in their mouths. "We have a national emergency on our hands. We literally are raising a generation of incom-petents."

While it is true that the Gallup Poll and newspaper editorials indicate all children seem to be "slipping" in the acquisition of the basic literacy skills, the actual longitudinal tests records do not confirm this. They do confirm that poor minority students are by all measures still far behind minority and white middle-class students, a world-wide class difference problem.

In summary, although overall gains have been made, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (1975) revealed that 42% of in-school, 17 year old, black urban students are functionally illiterate. Minority students score an average of 100 points below whites on SAT exams, score 2 to 3 years below grade level on standardized achievement tests and are disproportionately failing State and local competency tests. Some intervention must occur to turn around this serious problem. This is an area where our concentrated, focused efforts must go in the 80's.

WHY DOES THIS PROBLEM EXIST FOR MINORITY YOUNGSTERS AND WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF ILLITERACY FOR MINORITY YOUNGSTERS?

There are 3 major reasons that this problem exists:

(1) The literacy demands in this nation have grown increasingly complex as our society has advanced and has become more technologically oriented.

(2) The education and resources provided poor minority youngsters are inferior to the general education and resources provided to others in the society; thus, these students do not show up well on tests because of unequal educational opportunities.

(3) Achievement and motivation appear to be low for students, teachers, and parents of poor minority youngsters.

Increased literacy demands

Today we are faced with a print and knowledge explosion unlike any we have previously experienced. However, an additional consideration in literacy development is that print is not the only way of acquiring information. Ninety-nine and nine-tenths percent of American homes have at least one radio. Computers now send messages - calculating at a rate of 4 to 5 million "actrons" every second. Americans have about 125 million television sets - nearly two sets for every household with TV being viewed 6 1/3 hours everyday. Children watch television from 4,000 to 5,000 hours before they ever go to school. And, before they graduate, students spend more time in front of television than in front of teachers. The American public seems to have

switched from print to switching on the TV as their preferred way of getting information.

Yet, printed publications have multiplied dramatically in recent years. In 1960, 15,000 book titles were published; a decade later, the number had more than doubled, to over 36,000. More than 2,000 large, closely printed pages are now required merely to list by author, title, and subject the paper books currently in print. And the Library of Congress is acquiring some new material every second of every working day. In one day, more information is transmitted than the total knowledge available to mankind in the Renaissance.

Professor Ted R. Riltz analyzed materials that an ordinary person has to read. He found that a 6th grade reading level is required to understand a driver's license manual. An 8th grade level is needed to follow the directions on a frozen TV dinner. Aspirin bottle instructions are written at a 10th grade level. To understand an insurance policy requires a 12th grade ability, and, college ability is required to figure out the meaning of an apartment lease.

Forty years ago, those who could write their name and read several books and simple messages were considered educated, literate persons. Today, given the explosion of knowledge and print and the new technology, a person with the same skills is considered functionally illiterate. Students are not dumber than their predecessor, they simply cannot survive with the same level of skills possessed by their parents and grandparents.

Why does this problem of poor achievement exist for minority youngstes?

REASON °1: The literacy demands are more complex and they need to know more than their parents or grandparents.
REASON °2: The education and resources provided poor minority youngsters are inferior to the general education and resources provided to others in the society; thus, these students do not show up well on tests because of unequal educational opportunities.

In Small Futures: Children, Inequality, and the Limits of Liberal Reform, policy analyst Richard H. de Lone concludes that class, race, and sex are the most important elements in determining a child's future. The inequalities which characterize the distribution of power, influence, income, wealth and employment opportunity have not diminished over time. Since World War II, for instance, de Lone finds the distribution of income virtually frozen.

-- The top fifth of U.S. families receive somewhat over 40 percent of the country's net family income, and families in the bottom fifth receive between five and six percent. It is these differences which make it impossible for children born poor and rich to enjoy truly equal opportunity.

-- The top four percent of families own 37 percent of personal wealth. The net worth of the average family in the bottom 20 percent was zero.

-- School finance systems discriminate against poor children on the bases of personal and school district wealth.

On March 13, 1979 in Colorado, State Judge Joseph Quinn ruled discrimination in the education of poor children in the case of Lujain vs Colorado State Board of Education. Quinn also held that education provided to Colorado school children is not thorough and uniform as mandated by the State constitution. The suit alleged that children in those school districts receive an education inferior to that provided children who live in school districts with greater property wealth.

The school children's claims were based on an analyses of per pupil expenditures around the State. That investigation revealed that the 1975 average per pupil expenditure in the 16 school districts represented in the suit was $1,054, compared with a statewide average of $1,329. In the same year expenditures varied from a low of $811 per pupil in one district to a high of $3,587 in another. Quinn ruled that such finance systems violated the equal protection guarantee of the State constitution because it infringes on the fundamental right of equal educational opportunity. Somehow, this inequality is not taken into consideration in testing programs. It is mysterious why testing is considered a cure-all for basic skills improvement of poor youngsters. Testing is not an equalizer.

Competency/Proficiency and/or achievement assessment alone will not solve the problem. We must carefully analyze and even do a little soul searching to determine why so many State and local educational agencies are so devoted to proficiency assessment as a primary strategy for basic skills improvement. Even more curious is why the basic skills testing thrust at the secondary level, the level least equipped to develop basic skills. Chris Pipho of the Educa-

tion Commission of the States monitors the national movement towards State coompetency/proficiency assessment programs. Thirty-six States have competency assessments. The question that I wish to pose is why testing is seemingly viewed by so many in this nation as a cure-all for basic skills ills. Is the testing simply to point up who at the State and local levels is experiencing defeat in the quest for basic skills? At this point, don't we know from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, State and local testing programs who is experiencing difficulty in the acquisition of basic skills. We know - poor and alienated youngsters; including urban Blacks (42% of whom are functionally illiterate according to the NAEP), rural Blacks and whites, limited English speaking youngsters and white middle class youngsters either turned off by school or for some other reason experiencing difficulty in learning. Interestingly, we separate these youngsters, declaring them learning disabled or dyslexic which make it obviously a social disease of the higher order. Those youngsters with socio-cultural and perceptual orientations different from the majority groups are having difficulty in basic skills achievement. (You did not know that, did you? I am sure this is new information to you.) The question remains: what are we going to do about it? The answer to this question must focus on impacting instruction in the classroom. Let me quickly declare that I am not anti-testing. Tests are essential tools that can adequately meet the program need of assessing how much studentshave learned. I accept this as a meaningful and necessary service provided by tests.

I am not going into the issues related to testing such as cultural bias, norm referenced vs. criterion referenced, etc. Let me just say that there is a felt national need to get people to understand the purpose, interpretation, and best use of test data. Let me also point out that in order for testing to assist in basic skills improvement, test data must be viewed as an indicator of the appropriateness of the program being presented to students in meeting the specific needs of those students. If a program is not working for a group of students, that programm is no good for those students no matter who designed it or on how many students it might have worked on in the past. A program or approach can be judged effective when it raises the achievement levels, both cognitive and affective, of students.

Turnbull, President of Education Testing Service (ETS), in a report called "Achievement Test Scores in Perspective", identified three fallacies that have encouraged the misuse of test socres:

Micrometer Fallacy:

Some people have invested test scores with a precision, an infallibility, that they never possessed. (In relation to this, think of the test being designed by ad hoc committees with no background in test construction which often lack content and construct validity as well as reliability. The educational fate and lives of students being assessed for "minimal competencies" are being determined by these most falliable and imprecise instruments).

Whole Person Fallacy:

There has been a tendency to read into achievement test scores much more than they really tell, which is simply the amount a student has learned in a given area [I must add that for some students this relates to what is taught or not taught in school. Some students have the edge because if it is not taught at school, the parent teaches it at home, like you or I may do if we feel our kid is falling behind in something].

Equal Preparation Fallacy:

Some people expect the test to compensate somehow for the differences in academic development of children whose learning opportunities have differed dramatically. The test score tells you nothing about the instructional opportunities or difficulties a student has had to overcome to acquire a given level of proficiency, although it tells you a great deal about what that level of proficiency is [a fact that is central to deciding what the student is ready to tackle next.]

Turnbull points out, "Those who would ascribe to tests some magic that enables them to divine genetic intelligence of ability to learn should forget it. Achievement tests measure developed ability - developed in relation to a particular [skill], subject or discipline. Equal opportunity in education, simply has not been realized. To think that, at 18 years of age, people whose opportunities and experiences have been vastly different can show their inborn, [undeveloped] potential through a test of verbal and mathematical reasoning, regardless of their cultural and educational disadvantages is naive [and unrealistic]".

Tests must be viewed and used with an eye towards telling us what we need to do next to assist a student in basic skills development. One last point on testing (important to basic skills improvement) is that the more closely matched and diagnostic the test items are in relationship to the objectives of the actual, in-class instructional programs, the more utilitarian the test results will be in basic skills improvement. The greatest challenge and key to success is to accurately and consistently match standards/objectives, assessment tools, instruction and materials to the assessed needs of each student in the design of a viable basic skills improvement program.

Reason °3: Achievement motivation appears to be low for students, teachers, and parents of poor minority youngsters. Parents must get involved in the education of their youngsters. The only way that education can and will work for poor children is by genuine participation by the parents/community in the education of their children. Education has mainly been ineffective for poor children and nothing will change unless outside ideas, pressures, intervention and stimulation of the real world are brought to bear on the schools by the parents/community members.

Our schools must teach all children the basic skills of reading, mathematics and effective communication, both oral and written. But only basic skills taught in isolation is not enough for poor youngsters or any youngsters. Students need a balanced educational curriculum. Students must be taught how to think, how to learn and how to apply knowledge from several disciplines in order to solve parti-

cular problems. Teaching discrete facts, memorized in isolation with no opportunities for application is a waste of time and mind. As the Negro College Funds' slogan states: "A mind is a terrible thing to waste!" The acid test in determing the viability of a proposed curriculum of studies is, "Is this what I want for my own child?"

Teachers must believe in students and have the student's respect and confidence if they are to succeed in teaching them anything. Students must put forth effort to learn if they are to succeed in raising their basic skills achievement levels.

Rev. Jesse Jackson, the National President of Operation Push indicated in his September 8, 1979 International Literacy Day speech, that:

> "First, it is difficult for people to fight functional illiteracy if they are functionally immoral, functionally irresponsible, functionally uncaring. Teachers and parents and government officials must be functionally moral to be vessels or conduits worthy of bearing a message so challenging as the need to move from illiteracy to literacy"

He goes on to say that:

> "All of our children, no matter what their condition or previous condition, must accept the fact that effort must exceed opportunity for change to take place. Basic effort - Effort. Our children are not so dumb that they will not learn if they study. On the other hand, no matter what the historical circumstance is or was, they will never learn unless they do study.

> There is a fundamental question of effort. We are arriving at fantastic athletic achievement levels because we average three hours a day after school practicing...If we spend the same amount of energy developing cognitive skills as we spend on motor skills, we will become as proficient in reading and reasoning, writing and counting, as we are in jumping, running and skipping."

In summary there must be a better effort on the part of the parent, the teacher and the student if minority youngsters are to reach appropriate levels of literacy.

[WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT WAYS OF IMPROVING BASIC LITERACY SKILLS]?

ABOUT READING PROGRAMS

A study of the research reveals that successful basic literacy programs have shared characteristics. Most show the necessity of having:

1. Strong administrative support; teacher support
2. Clearly stated academic objectives in a hierarchically sequenced, structured curriculum
3. A cooperatively evolved systematic program assessment, planning implementation, management and evaluation procedure
4. A staff development program directly related to the instructional needs of the students and methods selected
5. Planned, active parent involvement
6. Trained support/resource personnel with programs coordinated with the classroom teacher's program
7. Appropriate, relevant, high intensity, individualized or small group direct instruction which contains immediate and continuous feedback for the student. The feedback is used diagnostically by the teacher in a continuous monitoring of progress on identified instructional objectives.
8. A well coordinated basic skills program. (Title I w/R2R w/Handicapped, etc.)
9. An expectation of success from each student with the cause of failure assigned to the strategy/school, not deficiencies inherent as the student
10. Internal consistency between instructional objectives, diagnostic assessments, instruction, materials, evaluations.

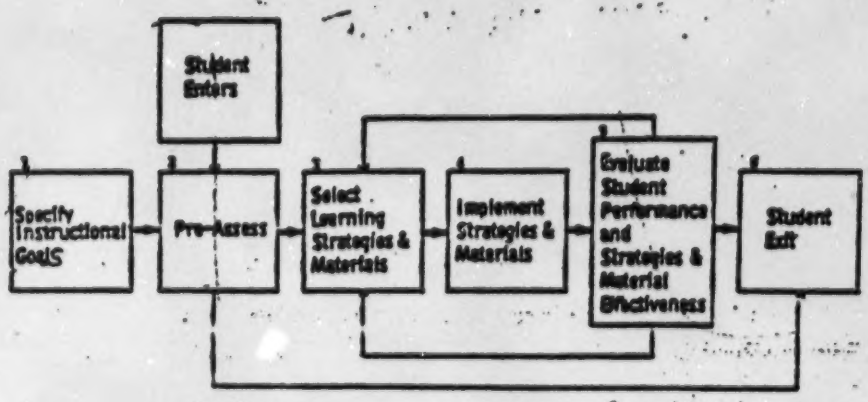
ABOUT INSTRUCTIONAL VARIABLES ASSOCIATED WITH EFFECTIVE TEACHING

Research shows the following variables associated with effective instructional programs:

1. Diagnosis of students' instructional levels and instructional skills strengths and weaknesses.
2. Development of instructional plans and strategies to meet the needs of each child.
3. Placement of students in proper level instructional lessons and materials geared to their diagnosed needs and levels.
4. Use of multiple materials with instructional consistency of methods among them and use of the materials consistentwith their author's design
5. Development and record keeping which tracks/monitors the progress of each child continuously and that acts as diagnostic and summary instruments which point up areas of pupil achievement and needs.
6. Maximum time on the assigned task by students and maximum instructional interaction time between teacher and student.
7. Balanced instructional and independent basic skills program which involves not only integrated skills training but frequent guided and independent basic skills developmental experiences for each student.
8. Students understand the purpose for the learning activity assigned and see the connection between the skills being presented and ultimately obtaining utilitarian literacy skills.

9. Skills that are learned are immediately applied
10. Skills are systematically, sequentially, and meaningfully developed
11. Tests, instruction, and materials are intricately interrelated and systematically reinforce each other
12. An instructional model similar to the one below is used in the systematic development of skills

INSTRUCTIONAL MODEL



The teacher is the critical element in a student's learning process. The quality of a teacher's instructional and classroom management skills makes a difference in his or her ability to teach basic skills. However, educators, and testmakers are not invincible in their assessment of the potential of young people. If you don't remember anything else I've said remember: Educators and testmakers are not invincible in their assessment of the potential of young people.

It is well for academics to remind themselves that neither Washington nor Lincoln, neither John Stuart Mill nor Herbert Spencer, neither Franklin nor Faraday nor Edison, nor Marlburough ever attended a University. That neither of the Wright brothers had so much as a high school diploma. Robert Fulton, Thomas A. Edison, and Henry Ford never went to college.

Ultimately, let us be extremely wary about using basic skills to judge the present and future worth of our children. Tests, grades, and teachers are not omnipotent in assessing the potential of a human being.

Every educator should be humbled in these memories:

> GEORGE BERNARD SHAW WAS CONSIDERED A VERY POOR SPELLER,
> PABLO PICASSO WAS JUDGED TO BE SLOW IN MATHEMATICS.
> ALBERT EINSTEIN, SALVADOR DALI, EDGAR ALLEN POE, GEORGE BERNARD SHAW, IGNACI PADEREWSKI AND JAMES WHISTLER WERE ALL EXPELLED FROM SCHOOL.
> EINSTEIN CONSISTENTLY FLUNKED MATHEMATICS! HE DIDN'T READ WELL EITHER AND WAS IN THE SLOW GROUP.
> THOMAS EDISON FINALLY FINISHED HIGH SCHOOL, BUT HE WAS AT THE BOTTOM OF HIS GRADUATION CLASS.
> ABRAHAM LINCOLN AND HENRY FORD, IN THEIR EARLY SCHOOL LIFE, WERE BRANDED AS PERSONS WHO SHOWED NO PROMISE.

You know of the great contributions these people made, each in his own way to the world in which he lived.

Let us remember the real purpose of education - NOT to count students OUT but to fit them INTO the society. The challenge of the 80's? To insure, as one poet states:

> To every person the right
> To every person the opportunity
> To live, to grow, and to become
> Whatever his thinking, talents, and efforts

Can combine to make him
This, is the promise of America.

The challenge of the 80's is to deliver on the Promise of America for every student in this country - this is what will make America continue to be great!